

THE ENTOMOLOGY OF DOCTOR BRICKELL'S
"NATURAL HISTORY OF NORTH
CAROLINA"

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Ever since Columbus discovered America, visitors to these shores have been going home and recording their impressions in print, and John Brickell, M.D., was no exception. He traveled in North Carolina previous to 1723 and found the planters living at ease in pleasant and picturesque surroundings. Poverty was almost unknown; food was plentiful, cider and persimmon beer were made at home and rum and brandy were imported. Cock fighting, horse racing, wrestling, dancing, cards, and dice furnished adequate amusement, and the girls were handsome. Being a doctor, however, he found it necessary to inject a discordant note, and so he mentions the prevalence of yaws, cholera morbus, convulsions, whooping cough, ring worms, rashes, prickly heat and the itch, together with a few more ailments not usually expressed by present-day visitors. The domestic animals, the trees, and vines, fruit production, bears, pole-cats and other wild animals, frogs, lizards, toads, birds, rattlesnakes, insects, whales, fishes, the laws, roads, negroes and Indians all come in for more or less extended comment, some of which is quite diverting. For instance, Brickell says: "The Indian Women are never known to scold, and it is a thing impossible to hear them make use of that unruly Member the Tongue, with such Rage and Malice as our European Dames are subject to, whom I could wish would set these Indians for a Pattern, by which means there would be more Quietness and better Harmony in most Families than at present is to be met with."

Some eight or nine pages are devoted to such insects as bees, silkworms, butterflies and moths, grasshoppers, cicadas, fire-flies, crickets, hog lice, lady bird beetles, ants, blister beetles, earwigs, black flies, gad-flies, clothes moths, bed bugs, roaches, tumble

“bugs,” stag beetles, sand flies, dragon-flies, wasps, hornets, fleas, lice and mosquitoes. For the most part the accounts are descriptive of the habits rather than of the insects themselves and are general enough to apply to groups rather than species.

Doctor Brickell stresses the supposed medicinal qualities of the insects; in fact, his medical opinions break forth throughout his book whenever the plants and animals are thought to possess healing virtues. Dried, powdered silkworms “laid to the Crown of the Head, are good in Megrims, Vertigoes and Convulsions, and the Ashes of the Silk cleaneth Wounds, &c.” Powdered cicadas, which Brickell calls grasshoppers, “given with Pepper, help the Cholick.” Hog lice are “good in all Obstructions, Jaundice, Cholick, King’s Evil, old sordid and rebellious Uleers, Convulsions, Stone and Gravel, Rickets in Children, dimness of Sight,” etc. The eggs (probably pupæ) of ants “help deafness, and many other excellent virtues are attributed to them.” And so on throughout, indicating that Brickell was familiar with Pliny and later authors, repeating as he does their mistakes and quaint conceptions.

The following extracts are examples of Brickell’s method and style:

“The *Lady Bird* is a beautiful small Insect (with red Wings and black spots thereon) which the Children in *Ireland* frequently play with; it is to be met with in *Carolina* in the *Summer* time, and is a wonderful Cordial, curing all Fevers how poysonous or malignant soever, by its sudorifick quality. The Powder of its Body is of a deep Purple colour, and emits its Tincture into Water and Spirits of Wine, being not inferior to Saffron.”

“The *Moth* is there likewise, and differs in nothing from those in *Europe*, being as mischievous and destructive to Woollen Cloths and Books as those with us. An Oil made of them is said to cure Deafness, Warts, and the Leprosy, and being mixed with Tar, to be good in all sorts of rebellious Uleers, Botches, Scabs, Whittles, &c.”

“The *Weevil*, is a little small Worm, not much bigger than a *Mite*, and is very distructive to Trees, but more especially to Corn, for I have seen Barrels full of *Indian* Wheat or *Maiz* in-

tirely ruined by these Insects, when there has not proper care been taken, to prevent their doing mischief. They never meddle with any grain (exposed in the weather) but when it is put up in close places, such as barrels and the like, yet this may be easily remedied by shaking a little Salt at the bottom and top of those vessels the Corn is in."

"The *Chinch Wall-louse*, or *Buggs*; these are flat, red, and in shape and bigness like the *Sheep-louse*, they have an offensive smell when they are killed, they haunt Beds, suck Men's Blood very greedily, especially about the Neck and Face, which in many appeareth for a Day or two, as if stung with Nettles, and are as numerous in this Province as in *France* or *Spain*. *Pliny* saith, they are good against all Poysons and biting of *Serpents*. *Marcellus* saith, that the Powder of them cures all Fevers, their Scent, the Fits of the Mother, and that they are successful to force away the Birth, and After-birth."

"The *Cock-roch*, is a kind of *Beetle*, something larger than a *Cricket*, and of a dark brown Colour; they frequent the Houses, and are very mischievous among Books and Linnen, by eating innumerable Holes in them, if there be not care taken to sweep and keep those places clean where those things are laid up. When they are killed, they stink like *Buggs*; their Uses in Physick are uncertain."

Doctor Brickell's book was published in Dublin, 1723, and the subscribers according to the 1737 edition (8vo, xv + 408 pp.) numbered 211. The title page of this edition is as follows: The Natural / History / of / *North-Carolina*. / with an / Account / of the / Trade, Manners, and Customs of the / Christian and Indian Inhabitants. Il- / lustrated with *Copper-Plates*, whereon are / curiously Engraved the *Map* of the Country, / several strange *Beasts, Birds, Fishes, Snakes, / Insects, Trees, and Plants, &c. / By John Brickell, M.D. / Nostra nos in urbe peregrinamur* Cic. / Dublin / Printed by James Carson, in *Coghill's-Court, Dame- / street*, opposite to the *Castle-Market*. For the Author, / 1737.

Brickell's "Natural History" appeared eight years before volume one of Catesby's "Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands" was published, but so far as the in-

sects, and probably the other animals also, are concerned it added little or nothing of scientific value to the then existing knowledge. However, its readability as a traveler's narrative and the interest at that time in America were more than likely responsible for the later editions of 1737, 1739 and 1743. Doctor Brickell was also the author of a folio entitled "Catalogue of American Trees and Shrubs, which will endure the climate of England," London, 1739.